



## **Volker Eisele (1937-2015) Obituary**

Volker Eisele, land preservationist and Napa Valley vintner, died at his home in the Napa Valley on Jan. 2, 2015. Born in Munster, Germany, Aug. 27, 1937, Eisele immigrated to the U.S. when in his 20s. He moved to California after being accepted as a graduate student in the Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley. Here he not only pursued his studies but also an attractive fellow student, Liesel Volwassen, whom he soon married. To make ends meet, Volker worked at Cody's bookstore in Berkeley as the main buyer for foreign books and, with Liesel, bred and sold briard puppies.

Although inherent urbanites, both Volker and Liesel harbored a longtime dream of living in the country and had spent numerous summers and weekends in the Napa Valley. When presented with the opportunity of purchasing a somewhat neglected prune orchard and vineyard in the Chiles Valley District of Napa Valley, the Eiseles quickly bought the property and became country people. Volker then undertook the task of rejuvenating the existing vineyards and replacing the orchard with additional vines. At this time he was also hired by the French Roederer Champagne Co. to develop and manage vineyards for sparkling wine in Anderson Valley. Respect for the soil and the natural environment of Napa County led Volker to pursue organic farming methods and to seek ways in which agricultural land could be protected.

These interests brought him into close contact with Si and June Foote, charter members of the Land Trust of Napa County, and supporters of the 1968 Ag Preserve ordinance. Over the next two decades, Eisele's increasing concern for Napa County agricultural land and open space caused him to become an outspoken advocate for land preservation and organic farming practices. His influence was felt not only through his far-reaching personal contacts but also through his leadership as Napa County Farm Bureau president and in the Napa Valley Grapegrowers Association and the Napa Valley Vintners Association. Finally, in 1990, his efforts crystallized in a county mandate, Measure J, which required that any requested change in use of agricultural land must be put to a countywide vote, and thus made ag and open space land conversions more difficult. Measure P, which replicates the provisions of Measure J, has more recently been passed, again largely through Volker's efforts, and extends the provisions of these propositions to 2058. The protection provided by these measures, as well as Volker's mentoring and the farming practices he employed, have made significant impacts in the preservation of the Napa Valley. In 2008 he was named "outstanding agriculturist of the year" by the Napa County Farm Bureau.

In parallel with his activism in land preservation, Eisele continued to develop his own vineyards and, in collaboration with his son, Alexander, produced the Volker Eisele Family Estate wines that have received high praise and ratings. Volker had a lifelong devotion to classical music and opera and for many years was a member of the Napa Valley Choral Society. He also regularly made time to teach Sunday school to children at the St. Helena Catholic Church.

Eisele is survived by his wife, Liesel; his son, Alexander and wife Catherine; his daughter, Christiane; and two grandsons, Simon Finn and Tristan Wolf. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made in Volker Eisele's name to the Land Trust of Napa County.

A celebration of Volker's life and his work to protect agricultural lands will be held in April in conjunction with the 47th anniversary of the Ag Preserve.